

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 410

By Clemmons

A RESOLUTION to honor Reverend James Lawson upon his receipt of the NAACP Chairman's Award and his service to the Nashville community.

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly take great pleasure in recognizing a civil rights leader whose contributions to American society have inspired subsequent generations to live up to his example; and

WHEREAS, the Reverend James Lawson, civil rights icon and Vanderbilt University Distinguished Professor, emeritus, has been honored with the prestigious NAACP Chairman's Award, which recognizes "individuals who demonstrate exemplary public service and use their distinct platforms to create agents of change"; and

WHEREAS, recognized on the nationally televised 2021 NAACP Image Awards, Reverend Lawson was honored for "his work as a social change advocate and his critical contributions to the Civil Rights movement, specifically his integral role in the nonviolent protests in the U.S. South in the 1960s"; and

WHEREAS, during a lifetime of purpose and commitment to others, Reverend Lawson profoundly impacted Vanderbilt University and the Nashville community as a whole; and

WHEREAS, after coming to Vanderbilt Divinity School as a transfer student in 1958, he helped organize sit-ins to desegregate lunch counters in downtown Nashville; Reverend Lawson's participation in the sit-ins led to his expulsion from Vanderbilt in 1960 following a vote by the executive committee of the university's Board of Trust, a move that generated national headlines and prompted some faculty members to resign in protest; and

WHEREAS, Vanderbilt and Reverend Lawson later reconciled, and in 1996, he received the Vanderbilt Divinity School's first Distinguished Alumni/ae Award; and



WHEREAS, Reverend Lawson returned to Vanderbilt as a Distinguished University Professor and taught there from 2006 to 2009; in 2007, the James M. Lawson Jr. Chair at Vanderbilt was established in his honor; and

WHEREAS, he donated a significant portion of his papers to the Jean and Alexander Heard Libraries' Special Collections in 2013, and a scholarship for undergraduate students at Vanderbilt was named in his honor in 2018; and

WHEREAS, Reverend Lawson's tremendous positive influence upon the Vanderbilt community and his great personal sacrifice in bringing about the desegregation of Nashville's public facilities have earned him praise as "the spiritual and intellectual heartbeat of nonviolent social changes" and "a pioneer of public theology and racial justice"; and

WHEREAS, Reverend James Lawson is a great man who continues to fight for civil rights for all Americans; through his spiritual belief in the good in all of us, he serves as "an enduring witness to a God of justice, mercy and love"; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we honor and congratulate Reverend James Lawson upon his receipt of the NAACP Chairman's Award, thank him for his pioneering work in helping to desegregate Nashville's public facilities and business community, and extend to him our best wishes for much continued success and happiness.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy and upon proper request made to the appropriate clerk, the language appearing immediately following the State seal appear without House or Senate designation.